

Lastly, and most importantly, we must remember that the label 'poor' means more than a cold numeric value attributed to one's earning potential. We must remember that America's poor have a face. That face exists today!

They are the homeless, freezing in the cold, because their job does not pay enough to cover the rent or because they have no job. They are children who cannot concentrate at school because hunger fills their daytime thoughts. They are uninsured Americans who, before the passage of the Affordable Care Act, could not afford quality health insurance.

They are hard working Americans just striving to make ends meet and, like the majority of us, gripped with the goal of creating a better life for themselves and loved ones.

We cannot turn our back on them now.

We must continue to fight the war on poverty—and we must win!

We must rededicate ourselves to the values that Lyndon Johnson lifted up 50 years ago.

Values that set a moral standard for America and for which we still must strive. Values that were given to us over 2,000 years ago by Jesus in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats found in the 25th Chapter of Matthew.

For when I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me. And whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

President Johnson took that to heart 50 years ago. And we today must do the same.

HOMEOWNER FLOOD INSURANCE AFFORDABILITY ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MARINO) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MARINO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

Mr. MARINO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to continue to bring attention to an issue that is devastating the people of Pennsylvania—across the 10th District and other districts in Pennsylvania—and across this country. It is the implementation of the Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012.

It has unintentionally burdened lower- and middle class homeowners and small businesses. Rates have increased astronomically. Biggert-Waters had the best of intentions. However, FEMA's methodology is severely flawed, and FEMA failed to warn Congress.

This afternoon, I am joined by a bipartisan group of my colleagues from across the country; and while the de-

tails of a proposed solution may vary, I believe we are unified behind the goal of protecting the livelihoods and investments of hardworking Americans.

Our homes are often our most valuable assets in that they allow us to retire; they allow us to send our children to college; they allow us to leave something behind for our children and our grandchildren for a better life. These homes form the backbone of riverside and coastal working-class communities. The downfall of these residential real estate markets will be catastrophic. Homeowners will lose their total investments in their properties. Small businesses will lose their customers, not to mention their real estate. Small banks will go out of business because people are not able to pay the insurance that the mortgages call for. The communities left behind will no longer have an adequate tax base to fund basic services.

I believe the best solution right now is to repeal Biggert-Waters in its entirety and to start again from square one. Authors of the law on the House Financial Services Committee intended to stabilize the National Flood Insurance Program, but this law has disproportionately affected low- and middle class homeowners who cannot afford these premiums.

Although we here in Congress tend to think in abstract terms, I want to share some of the stories I have heard from my neighbors back home in the 10th Congressional District of Pennsylvania.

Jeff and Erica Waldman purchased a house in Muncy, Pennsylvania. Their flood insurance premium was initially \$900 per year. Now they are being told to pay by the end of last year—the 31st, a few days ago—\$9,000 a year for flood insurance—up front. Jeff and Erica are frustrated about the lack of information they were given and are days away from losing their home as we speak. We cannot solely place this burden on people like Jeff and Erica.

Laurie and Michael Portanova purchased three historic properties in Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania, last year, hoping that their new business would rejuvenate the Main Street feel for the borough. Their flood insurance premium per year was \$2,800. They received a notice that they had to pay \$40,000 by the end of the year for flood insurance, by the end of 2013. They are close to walking away from their investments and taking a huge loss. This would also have devastating consequences on other property owners in Jersey Shore, who will have an additional tax burden if homeowners in the area are not able to keep their homes because they are not able to pay the flood insurance.

Mr. Speaker, at this time, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Congressman THOMPSON.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman for yielding, and I appreciate my good friend from Pennsylvania for

hosting this Special Order on a very serious issue.

Biggert-Waters, I think, was a piece of legislation that we all had great hopes for in terms of the National Flood Insurance Program. As the commercial insurance industry really exited the insuring of flood risk, it was left to the Federal Government; and with the recent flooding, obviously, over the past number of years, that fund has been decimated. Last year, on a bipartisan basis, Congress passed the Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012. The measure included some long overdue reforms that strengthened the financial solvency and administrative efficiency of the National Flood Insurance Program.

The rationale for the 2012 law was the need for the National Flood Insurance Program to more accurately reflect flood risk. Historically, most low-risk States have subsidized higher risk States, mostly coastal. Similarly, low-risk areas within the States have tended to subsidize those areas with a higher risk, more prone to flooding. The linchpin of the 2012 law, however, was to use true actuarial rates in order to prevent very low-risk areas from subsidizing moderate to high-risk areas. The unintended consequences have been drastic premium increases for those plans that were traditionally subsidized by the National Flood Insurance Program.

Under the law, Congress mandated that the Federal Emergency Management Agency complete an affordability study to further evaluate any unintended consequences as a result of the changes. The study was to be completed before the rate increase went into effect. I want to repeat that. The law that was passed in 2012 had a safeguard in there that the administration, through the agency FEMA, was to do affordability studies before rates went up. That is not what happened, Mr. Speaker. That would have been critical to understanding the full scope of the new risk model. FEMA has failed to complete the affordability study that was required under the law. Additionally, there remains a huge concern that FEMA does not have the data that it needs to accurately determine risk under this new policy regime and that it is incapable of creating a new mapping system that truly reflects true actuarial rates.

Now, while 80 percent of the policyholders in this country will not see an increase as a result of the new policy, a small portion of the properties in this country—actually, I think it is a significant portion of properties—are being hit with staggering increases. This is a serious concern for communities and individuals across the country, including many from the Fifth District of Pennsylvania.

Just recently, I have heard from counties, communities and homeowners from Cameron County and Erie County—Clinton, McKean, Crawford, Potter, Huntington, and Centre—and

that is just in recent days. I think we are at risk of creating ghost towns as homes have lost so much value. You may be able to afford the mortgage, but you can't afford the flood insurance. As my good friend said, the number one assets that individuals have in their lives are their properties—their homes, their real estate. When it comes time to be able to sell them, they are not able to liquidate them because there is no one out there who is able to buy. So we are really at risk of creating these ghost towns unless we make the necessary changes, I think, to have the administration comply with the law as it was passed in 2012 in terms of affordability rates.

Colleagues on both sides of the aisle have come together to correct this critically important issue. I am an original cosponsors of the Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act, H.R. 3370. I know my good friend Mr. MARINO has introduced another bill that would completely repeal Biggert-Waters, most recently introduced within the past couple of days.

H.R. 3370 is a bill to terminate the rate increase under the Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012 until 2 years after the Federal Emergency Management completes the rate affordability study originally mandated under the law. The bill also makes structural changes to FEMA to ensure that there are advocates for homeowners when flood maps are drawn or adjusted.

Mr. Speaker, improving the financial viability of the Nation's flood insurance program while ensuring that program protects those it was designed to support is something every Member of this body should support.

I encourage my colleagues to join in this commonsense effort to protect and improve our Nation's flood insurance program but also to make sure that our real estate market remains strong and viable and that that important asset that individuals have remains able to be bought and sold.

I thank the gentleman for hosting this Special Order.

□ 1730

Mr. MARINO. Thank you, Congressman THOMPSON.

I would like to add a true story happening right now in my district due to these increases in rates. Nikki Burrows met her husband, bought their home in Muncy in 2006. Insurance premiums more than doubled from \$862 to \$1,750; but because the Burrows had suffered flood damage from Tropical Storm Lee in 2011, they are subject to an additional 20 percent on their premiums until they max out. Add an annual fee of \$4,000 annually. So, in essence, they went from \$862 a year to \$4,000 a year because they were hit in one of the floods.

These Burrows are trapped. These townships and small towns along the rivers are trapped into a situation where the average mean income is about \$37,000. That's before taxes.

That's before mortgage payment. That's before food for the kids. That's before other insurances. Yet these people are to come up with \$4,000, \$6,000, \$8,000 and \$10,000 up front, per year, for flood insurance because of the unintended consequences of Biggert-Waters.

At this time, I yield to the gentleman from Massachusetts, Congressman KEATING, my colleague across the aisle and a former prosecutor.

Mr. KEATING. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

In an all-too-common occurrence in this Nation today, the Murphy family in Wareham, Massachusetts, has seen flood insurance premiums rise dramatically, from \$500 annually in their instance to \$5,000, a 10-time amount of an increase.

Anthony Frangie who is a Realtor at the South Shore portion of Massachusetts has seen multiple home sales fall through specifically because the flood insurance premiums were too high. This is a real estate industry, not just in my home State, but across the country, that has been reeling as a result of the worst downturn in the housing industry in recent years that our country has ever experienced.

They are beginning to come forward, sales are occurring. One of our most important industries, our housing industry is beginning to drive our economy forward, yet this is going to drive us back. The lending institutions that support this in States like Florida, where the inventory was so high, where they had houses that people walked away from because they couldn't afford and they couldn't sell themselves, now they have experienced improvement. But this is going to set them back, and it is going hurt our economy in the process, not just regionally, but nationally.

Last year, the owners of Haddad's Ocean Cafe in the community I represent of Marshfield renovated their restaurant to reflect the current flood requirements, and they went further. They even went higher when they made these kind of very expensive renovations, going above what was needed. Today, with the new flood maps, they must pay millions of dollars in additional renovations to further raise the building even higher or pay flood insurance premiums far in excess of \$30,000 annually, something that endangers their ability to conduct basic business.

These are just a few of the numerous examples and challenges facing homeowners and businesses that have arisen through the implementation of the new flood insurance changes. FEMA, at hearings that we have had here in answering to this issue about the implementation, has said they perceive their job to overestimate the impact of this. Clearly, there's something wrong with the implementation of this law.

Our office has had individual after individual come forward to us with things that affect their own person and their own homes looking for help. Some of them that can afford it have

moved forward with appeals. Many of those appeals have been successful. Yet they have had to invest and risk thousands of dollars in elevation studies in terms of site reviews just to bring their case forward.

Communities have gone together and brought forth appeals for the entire community. One of those communities in my district went forward; and they were so detailed, I looked at what they said and decided to bring it to the attention and to ask the advice and expertise of one of the Nation's top coastal expert groups. That's the University of Massachusetts School of Marine Science and Technology in Dartmouth, Massachusetts.

What they determined with their review was that the methodology used to determine these maps was faulty. In fact, one of the things they found was the wave structure that results in flooding is the result of storm surges and violent storms in the east and Atlantic coast and responsible for the floods. That wasn't used as the methodology to determine what the impact would be on the maps and what the cost would be for flood insurance on all these homeowners. Indeed, they used the methodology based on the Pacific Ocean, with a longer, slower wave structure; and the scientists and coastal engineers that reviewed this for us said what they did, determined to be the maps, was based on faulty science.

Now individuals are facing enormous burdens, as my colleagues have so aptly demonstrated. In terms of annual payments, that could be the difference between being able to stay in your own home, live in your own home, or not; annual payments that affect many people on fixed income who had never, ever budgeted for this and are throwing them into the most difficult decisions of how they are going to heat their home, how they are going to afford to live, what they are going to do. Even younger people who are using or hoping to use the equity on their home to pay for their kids' college education are finding that, instead of having this go towards that important goal in their life, it is going to pay for flood insurance.

Now, this is an important thing, not only how it affects people on annual payments, but what this also does, this affects and can affect the entire value of their home. In fact, real estate people are finding as they are going to sell the homes, that the homes that were valued one way are now dramatically being reduced because of the cost of annual flood insurance attached to that home.

So what we have really is a taking, as a result of the implementation, a taking of people's assets, of their savings, of the roof over their head, of the number one financial asset they have in their lives. Clearly, this is not the role of government to effectuate this kind of taking, because maybe the math is totally wrong and they shouldn't be included at all or maybe it

is off just 1 foot and it has this kind of devastating financial and personal impact. That's why I have joined my colleagues in being one of the original sponsors of the Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act.

Now this is done in a House that is often challenged in terms of working across the aisle, in terms of working in a bipartisan manner. But in this instance, it is a sterling example of how we have worked together across the aisle in a common interest, realizing how important this is to the people we represent, realizing how important this is to the real estate industry nationally, realizing how important this is to the lending institutions nationally and making sure that government isn't acting in a way that is actually seizing their personal assets and their life savings.

We have an obligation, having worked together so hard and, in my opinion, achieving a very significant majority of the Members of this House of Representatives to pass this kind of delay, to get it right and make sure we are treating people fairly, that it is inherent that this bill be brought to the floor for a vote and be brought to the floor quickly for a vote. We were expecting Senate action in this just in the next few weeks.

It is my hope, it is my plea, it is our obligation as the court of last resort representing these people who have so much in jeopardy right now, to bring it to the floor, to get a vote, to pass it, to get a delay to be able to make sure we go to FEMA and say, You are dealing with people's livelihoods. You have an obligation to get it right and get it done. And when they do, this bill will also allow us here in Congress to review it and make sure the implementation is continued in the correct manner.

Let's move forward on this very important issue as soon as possible. Let's show this as one more example, during these very challenging times politically, of what happens when this House listens to the people in their district and around the country, works together to get something done and does the right thing. It is my fervent hope that we can do this quickly.

Mr. MARINO. Thank you, Congressman KEATING.

I would like to reiterate the devastating effects that these premiums are having on the values of homes, affecting retirement plans, retirement plans for a lot of our seniors in the district. Tom Rishel, Tom is out of a pension. He does not have a retirement plan, so he invested in several properties in Muncy, Pennsylvania, hoping to one day resell the properties. His premium, on just one property, has jumped from \$600 a year to over \$9,500 a year. Tom, who is 70 years old, fears his properties are worthless and his dreams of retirement have been destroyed.

Mr. Speaker, at this time, I yield to the gentleman from Mississippi, Congressman PALAZZO.

Mr. PALAZZO. Thank you, Congressman, and thank you so much for putting this Special Order together this evening for us to talk about the devastating effects the Biggert-Waters Act is going to have on flood insurance premiums just not along coastal areas, but all across America.

For more than 40 years, residents who have lived in flood-prone areas have paid into the National Flood Insurance Program because virtually no private flood insurance market existed. The issues I and my colleagues have spent so much time addressing over the last year affect these 5 million NFIP policyholders.

What many Americans do not realize is that they could be the next flood victim, and they could be the next victim of these drastic flood insurance hikes and flawed FEMA policies.

According to FEMA Director Craig Fugate, 40 percent of the U.S. population lives in counties that border the ocean or the Great Lakes and are directly or indirectly affected by flood risk, and most U.S. counties contain rivers and streams that present flood hazards. Forty percent of the U.S. population—that's more than 126 million Americans—could be affected by these issues in the coming years.

This map shows exactly where you can find NFIP policyholders. We are not just talking about a few people living in coastal areas. This isn't just Mississippi, Louisiana, New York, New Jersey, or Florida's problem. This map hasn't even been updated to include those affected by the recent flooding in Colorado. We are talking about millions of people across America in every single State and just about every single congressional district who will be impacted by these drastic rate increases.

The Biggert-Waters Act of 2012 was passed with the intention of insuring that the program remained solvent for these policyholders to ensure that it is there for the people who have paid into the system when a disaster strikes. It was never intended to make rates so unaffordable that flood insurance is no longer attainable for these policyholders. Yet when you look at what is happening now and the way FEMA is implementing the law, that's exactly what we are seeing.

There are those who have said these people are just a bunch of wealthy waterfront homeowners. That is simply not true. I can tell you that's not the case in my district. I am hearing from teachers, veterans, fishermen, people who work at the shipyards in support of our Navy. These are everyday Americans, some of whom live 50 or 100 miles or more inland. These are folks who have been responsible in maintaining flood insurance policies for years and sunken untold thousands of dollars of their own funds into their community's recovery from Hurricane Katrina.

They built back to higher FEMA standards, many of them invested in mitigation against future risk. They

used every tool at their disposal and went to great lengths and great costs to comply with the law and do their part. Now they are being punished for doing that. They are being hit with astronomical rate increases overnight, or worse, they are unable to get straight answers from FEMA or from their flood insurance agents who are looking to FEMA for answers.

Many are retirement age. One bank in my district has estimated that at least 400 elderly homeowners are facing rate increases that are so drastic that it could force them into foreclosure.

Take Cheryl, a retired special education teacher married to Gerald, a retired aluminum plant worker and a Navy veteran. She says:

Please don't think that we live in a waterfront home. We live in an older neighborhood, miles inland.

She tells me that for 11 months they lived in a camper while working to rebuild, taking "extra precautions" and meeting the demands of inspectors and permits throughout the process.

"We felt proud to be part of the rebuilding of the Mississippi Gulf Coast" she says. But she also tells me, "A large increase could bury us."

Another military retiree couple on fixed incomes writes that their flood insurance rates have been estimated to rise from \$400 a year to at least \$4,000 a year. He says: "Despite doing our 'homework' prior to purchase, putting a considerable down payment on the home, doing due diligence following the storm by repairing our home" that flood map changes and increasing flood insurance rates have put them in the position to possibly lose their home with no fallback.

Linda, a 65-year old single woman, tells me she hopes to retire after 40 years working as a teacher. She says:

Like so many others, I rebuilt my home after Katrina following the guidelines of then current flood maps. If the flood rates go to the proposed levels there's no way I can afford to keep my home. I have worked all of my life, contributed to the community I live in, followed the rules, paid my debts. Now I am faced with losing my home, my retirement, and my sense of security.

□ 1745

These are just a few examples of how these rate increases are affecting everyday Mississippians. Millions more like them are all across the Nation, and some don't even realize the storm that is coming.

We are not just talking about a few folks along the coast. We are not talking about wealthy, waterfront homeowners looking for a taxpayer handout. Anyone who says otherwise is incredibly misinformed or blatantly misleading the American people.

These people, they are the reason we are here today. They are the reason that Republicans and Democrats from every corner of the country are supporting our efforts. We all share the same goal of ensuring flood insurance remains affordable and available to those who need it.

In this body, we have acted to make compassionate reforms, while keeping this program fiscally sound. We have worked to halt rate increases, address unintended consequences, and hold FEMA accountable for questionable methods and flawed implementation.

We will continue this fight for those who have been caught in the cracks through no fault of their own, for hard-working, everyday Americans who have followed all the rules and tried to do everything right. Now, we have a responsibility to make this right, and we will not stop until the job is finished.

Mr. MARINO. Thank you, Congressman PALAZZO. Your map says it all.

After speaking with many constituents during the recess, including five town halls that I held, I believe that many homeowners who have seen their rates increase were not even aware that the National Flood Insurance Program rates were partially subsidized by the Federal Government.

As the Congressman just said, please do not think that this pertains to California coast and the Pacific alone, or New Jersey or New York coastal. This affects people all across the United States.

Just in the State of Pennsylvania alone, we are not on a coast, we are in by several hundred miles, there are several thousand miles of waterways, rivers, creeks, streams.

Just to give you an example, in one of the town meetings, I asked Jeff and his wife—Jeff is from Muncie. Jeff and his wife bought a house, paid it off early, paid their taxes, kept their insurance up. Again, their insurance is going up from about \$600 a year to \$11,000 a year.

I said to Jeff, when you were at your closing, and the realtor is sitting with you, and the lawyer is sitting with you, and the bank is sitting with you, they came out to you and said, okay, now we need a check for the flood insurance because you have a federally-backed loan and you are in a flood area. So he wrote out a check for 6 or 700 bucks.

But I said, at that point, did anyone say to you that two-thirds of the cost of the flood insurance is subsidized by the Federal Government? He said, never.

I said, did anyone say to you that that subsidy could go away some day? Never.

Did anyone tell you that the rates were going up because of that subsidy? Never.

So it is not fair to the American people who are not told ahead of time—this is before recent closings—and they have the rug pulled out from under them.

So we are saying, in essence—and again, this is an unintended consequence of Biggert-Waters—FEMA did not give us the right information. I believe they held information back.

We are saying to the American people who are on \$35,000 a year or \$40,000 a year annual income, who have to pay \$10,000 up front, you know something?

We had a subsidy for you yesterday, but guess what? It is not there today, and it is too bad that you may lose your house.

We cannot let that happen.

Now, it gives me great pleasure to yield to the gentleman from New York, Congressman GRIMM.

Mr. GRIMM. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the opportunity to speak today, and for his hard work on this important issue.

I rise today to discuss this urgent need for Congress to act as quickly as possible to delay these skyrocketing flood insurance premiums that right now are absolutely crippling homeowners in my district of Staten Island and Brooklyn, as well as across this entire great Nation.

In 2012 we all know that Congress passed the Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act, and that was an attempt to stabilize the National Flood Insurance Program. That program does have problems. It finds itself in about \$30 billion of debt.

While well-intentioned, this law has had absolutely devastating effects on homeowners across the country. They are seeing their premiums increased not just by hundreds, but in many cases, by thousands of percent each year, with more increases to come into the future.

In my district alone, I met with hundreds of concerned citizens, homeowners. I have a senior who came to me with her bill for the new flood insurance and her old bill. The premium was \$2,200 a year, and the new bill was \$28,000. She is on a fixed income. She is not in a position to pay \$28,000 a year. Unfortunately for her, she can't sell the property because the property's value doesn't warrant such an extravagant flood insurance premium, so no one will buy it, so she is trapped.

I had a working-class family come to me and show me a bill for \$37,000. This is a working-class family. That was their flood insurance premium.

Again, what does that mean?

It means they are trapped because they can't sell the house. No one's going to buy a modest home for 2 or \$300,000 with flood insurance of \$37,000 a year.

So this situation cannot be allowed to continue, and it cannot be unaddressed.

Last year, my district and the entire Northeast was devastated by Superstorm Sandy. Tens of thousands of my constituents found themselves actually homeless for the first time in their lives. Their lives were completely turned upside down. They were wondering whether they would rebuild at all, how they were going to move forward.

Many of them literally lost everything they have ever known. Every worldly possession was gone. They knew then, as we do now, it would be years before their lives would return to any form of normalcy.

Many of these people, unfortunately, still have not moved back into their

homes. Many of them are struggling to rebuild, as we speak right now.

So to ask these victims of a natural disaster, who find themselves in an absolutely horrible position, through no fault of their own, to pay upwards of \$15,000 a year or more in flood insurance premiums so soon after a natural disaster took everything from them, amounts to nothing more than them being victimized again.

If these premiums continue to go into effect, many of my constituents will find themselves unable to pay both their mortgage and their flood insurance. Their property will, in best case scenario, lose considerable value, but in the worst case scenario, become completely worthless.

This is unacceptable. To many Americans, their home is the largest asset they can ever own in their lifetime. To essentially destroy the value of those assets through flood insurance premium increases amounts to one of the largest takings of private property in U.S. history.

Thankfully, there is a solution. There is a solution that has been proposed in both Houses of Congress, and which I am very proud to say, I am one of the lead sponsors of, H.R. 3370, the Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act, which would halt these draconian rate increases.

As of today, I can report that this commonsense legislation has over 170 bipartisan cosponsors, and that support is growing every single day.

This legislation simply would delay these rate increases for up to 4 years, giving FEMA time to both complete the affordability study mandated under Biggert-Waters and to propose a framework to Congress to maintain the long-term affordability of flood insurance. That will give Congress the time to consider their proposals.

If long-term affordability of flood insurance is not taken into account when setting future premiums, many Americans are simply going to stop paying for this important coverage. They are just not going to be able to do it.

This will only serve to damage the fiscal soundness of the National Flood Insurance Program over the long term. An expansion in the number of uninsured homes will only increase the direct cost to the Federal Government for future natural disasters.

It is common sense. It is mathematics. If people don't pay in to the program, the cost to the Federal Government will go up the next time there is a natural disaster. It is that simple.

So, in closing, I would like to urge my colleagues to join us in supporting this vital legislation. The sooner that we act to delay these flood insurance rate increases, the sooner we can bring stability, not only to the real estate market, but to our fragile economy, and we will be bringing much-needed relief to extremely nervous homeowners across this entire great Nation.

I thank my friend from Pennsylvania.

Mr. MARINO. Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. YOHIO). The gentleman has 25 minutes remaining.

Mr. MARINO. Mr. Speaker, I hold in my hand here a report, a statement from the National Association of Realtors.

Now, a moment ago I quoted realtors being at a closing and lawyers being at a closing and banks being at a closing, small banks. These people are informing me they never were told about these increases. I want to read a small section here from their statement dated November 19, 2013.

There is a subtitle of, Home buyers were not warned. I quote:

Because FEMA delayed, then retroactively applied, the purchase provisions in section 205, many home buyers, specifically, those who bought between the enactment of Biggert-Waters and March 12 of 2013, were not warned of rate increases before purchasing their properties. Flood insurance policies were not labeled as subsidies.

It is not their fault.

Mr. Speaker, at this time it gives me pleasure to yield to the gentleman from Louisiana, Congressman CASSIDY.

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the reform the Biggert-Waters Act. Let's first point out that the flood insurance program was reformed under Biggert-Waters with the goal to make it both affordable and accessible. It did indeed make flood insurance accessible, but it is being implemented in such a way as to make it unaffordable.

Now, the question is: Is this, as some people called it, a bailout for vacation homes for the rich people?

Is it going to improve the solvency of the program?

Yet, somehow do we have to see how these reforms play out before we reform once more?

Let's address each of these. This will do absolutely nothing for the solvency of the National Flood Insurance Program. Indeed, it is guaranteed to make it insolvent.

FEMA estimates that for every 10 percent increase in a premium, you have a 1 percent decrease in the number of people purchasing that policy. Do the math. Somebody whose policy is now \$700, if it rises to \$7,000, they have a basically 100 percent chance of dropping their policy.

When that happens, FEMA still has to cover their fixed costs. Those fixed costs are concentrated under fewer and fewer subscribers to the insurance policy, which means that even more people get to the point where they can no longer afford this policy, which means, that, again, that fixed cost is concentrated further. You have entered the death spiral of a program, so the National Flood Insurance Program dies. That will happen, under the assumptions used by CBO for these estimates.

Now, some would say, wait a second. FEMA actually had some good reforms

to work with. That is true, but they are not really implementing them.

FEMA is doing their few flood maps with what is called a no levee analysis. If the Army Corps of Engineers has not certified a flood control structure, FEMA pretends it is not there.

Now, Lafourche Parish in south Louisiana has a levee they built themselves, and they have pictures; on the one side they have floodwaters, and on the other side they have dry land with flowers. Those levees clearly work, but because they are not Army Corps of Engineers certified, Lafourche Parish gets no credit.

Jefferson Parish, a suburb of New Orleans, has big pumps to help reduce floodwaters, and yet FEMA does not include the efficacy of these in their flood maps.

This no levee analysis was not supposed to be part of Biggert-Waters, but that is how the program is being implemented.

□ 1800

Now, is this a bailout for rich people? The people in Louisiana who will benefit from reforming our current process, which is to say suffer under Biggert-Waters, as currently crafted, are working people. They work in the refineries that provide the gasoline for the rest of the Nation. Their homes are \$120,000 to \$220,000. These are not rich people insuring vacation homes. These are folks in their primary residences—in many cases, homes that have never flooded but, in many cases, homes that would suffer under this program.

And that leads me to the harm to the economy that will occur. The uncertainty of the cost of flood insurance is freezing real estate markets. Homebuilders have no market for the homes that they wish to build. There is a cratering of the bank lending. Indeed, there are reports of people taking their keys into the bank, dropping those keys on a desk, unable to afford the flood insurance, therefore unable to keep their mortgage so walking away from the home that they are attempting to purchase.

The impact upon the rest of the country? Most of the refined gasoline in the rest of the country is refined on the gulf coast, Louisiana, and in Texas. Those workers cannot afford to keep the homes that allow them to work in these refineries. There is an economic impact both locally in the State but it, indeed, goes nationwide. Flood insurance should be accessible. It should be affordable. Biggert-Waters needs to be further reformed in order to allow both.

Mr. MARINO. Thank you, Congressman CASSIDY.

Mr. Speaker, I represent 15 counties in the State of Pennsylvania; and I hold in my hand here a petition signed by over 1,000 people just from my county, Wyoming County, who are faced with this disaster. And most of these people have a combined income—before taxes—of less than \$40,000 a year.

Mr. Speaker, at this time, it is my pleasure to introduce the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Congressman FITZPATRICK.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. I thank my colleague from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Mr. MARINO) for organizing this Special Order here this evening.

And I know that Representative MARINO, like myself, is hearing from our constituents back home in Pennsylvania. They live, many of them, in areas that are surrounded by properties that are habitually and repetitively flooded. They pay their flood insurance premiums faithfully each and every year, and they are being negatively impacted by FEMA's implementation of the flood insurance reforms that occurred.

Last year, the reforms to the flood insurance program were passed because, since 2006, the Government Accountability Office has warned that the program was putting taxpayers at a high risk because of losses from Katrina back in 2005 and subsequent disasters. And since then, the program has been subsidized by the taxpayers and currently owes the Treasury—we heard earlier this evening perhaps as much as \$30 billion. And as the GAO stated, these risks are the result of structural weaknesses and how the rate structure provides funding to the program itself. As a result of this, the House and the Senate came together, and they reformed the program in some very important ways.

However, just because the National Flood Insurance Program was in desperate need of reform does not mean that we should just simply walk away and consider our jobs to be done. There are families across the country and in my district who are suffering from what they refer to as rate shock. I have heard from homeowners; I have heard from senior citizens who have lived in their homes for decades, trying to sell their homes in retirement. I have heard from young couples, newly married, first-time home buyers who have encountered significant challenges while trying to either sell their homes or purchase their first home. Some families are facing increases of up to 500 percent or more, and we heard about some of those examples tonight.

My office is working with many constituents, including one senior citizen from the section of Bristol Township, a beautiful section, a working-class neighborhood called Croydon, subject to some flooding. This homeowner raised her family, lived in the home for decades and now in her retirement wants to sell the asset she has in retirement, her home. And because the rates have been significantly increased and increased sort of going over a cliff—not over time but all at once—many potential buyers have walked away from her property and just said that they simply can't afford to purchase the property. She can't afford to sell the property. In her senior years,

that dream of retirement, she has been trapped in her home that she wanted to sell and move on into her retirement.

One possible solution is to more gently phase in the rate adjustments. Another would be to just freeze them outright while we work on a longer-term solution. Either way, I look forward to working with my colleagues, including those speaking here this evening. We can find a way to move forward with crucial reforms to a very important program while still protecting the families that we represent from reductions in the values of the homes that may very well be the only asset that they have or were counting on in their retirement.

So with that, Mr. MARINO, I thank you for your interest and concern for our mutual constituents back home in Pennsylvania on this issue.

Mr. MARINO. Thank you, Congressman FITZPATRICK.

Mr. Speaker, I now have the honor of introducing the gentlelady from Florida, Congresswoman ROS-LEHTINEN.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MARINO) for an incredible job of leading this effort.

Flooding is the Nation's number one disaster. Most insurance companies do not offer their own flood insurance, and standard homeowners' insurance policies do not cover flooding. Yet, Mr. Speaker, flood insurance is required to purchase a home in a flood plain in order to receive a federally backed mortgage.

The National Flood Insurance Program, NFIP, was created to help alleviate this dilemma. However, the program is over \$25 billion in debt. While a substantial portion of that debt is directly due to Hurricane Katrina, many elected officials and our constituents from places less familiar with flooding believe the problem is insolvent because of artificially low premiums. However, in my home State of Florida, Mr. Speaker, where nearly 40 percent of all NFIP policies are held, we have learned from devastating disasters, like Hurricane Andrew, and have effective building codes and flood mitigation projects in place. These policies have made our State, Florida, a net donor State to the program, where we pay far more in premiums than we ever receive back in payouts. Nevertheless, when the NFIP was last reauthorized, it contained provisions that would raise rates on all policyholders, sometimes by astronomical amounts.

And while the reauthorization program was vital because there had been a series of devastating program lapses that made it impossible to close on the purchase of a house, FEMA—the agency that administers the NFIP—testified that the rate increases would be nominal to most homeowners. Nominal? That, obviously, was far from the truth, and a mandated affordability study that was supposed to precede any increase was never completed.

These rate hikes are unwarranted. They are unfeasible. For that reason, I

have cosponsored different measures that would work to keep flood insurance rates affordable for my constituents in south Florida.

I have also signed on to a letter to House leadership opposing flood insurance hikes to encourage relief for the millions of homeowners, for the millions of small businesses susceptible to steep rate increases across the country. And I sent a letter to FEMA, asking this agency to use its authority to keep flood insurance rates affordable. I also voted to shield flood insurance policyholders from excessive rate hikes in this year's fiscal year '14 Homeland Security Appropriations Act.

Mr. Speaker, the National Flood Insurance Program is vital for our community; and without affordable rates, south Florida is in grave danger. Halting rate increases will ensure that families and businesses are able to thrive, rather than succumb to this inexcusable bureaucratic storm.

I thank Mr. MARINO of Pennsylvania for yielding and for his leadership on this important issue.

Mr. MARINO. At this time, I yield to the gentleman from Louisiana, Congressman SCALISE.

Mr. SCALISE. I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania for his leadership and for yielding time.

Clearly, when you look at the problems with the National Flood Insurance Program, what brought us to this point were a number of things. One was that the program continued to lapse over and over again. Multiple times, Congress had passed many patches and Band-Aids. And ultimately, we would like to see a private marketplace where people could go buy flood insurance. In fact, the Federal Government requires that people in many areas purchase flood insurance, and yet the only place you can go right now is NFIP. You can only go there to buy this, which is a requirement for people purchasing a home in many places.

So if you look at how the implementation by FEMA is adversely affecting millions of people across the country—specifically, some examples we have seen in southeast Louisiana, in my district, point out these glaring inequalities that have to be fixed by this Congress for this program to work properly. In fact, many of the things that we all want to see to get to an actuarially sound program will be undermined if the FEMA implementation goes forward without the reforms that we have been building a bipartisan coalition to implement.

And if you look at this—I will give you a couple of examples, Mr. Speaker, in south Louisiana. In Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes, right on the front lines of the Gulf of Mexico, we are not talking about people who have multi-million dollar vacation homes or anything like that. These are hardworking taxpayers, people that work in the oil field, helping produce American energy, people that are middle class families that are being faced now with this

rate shock. In many cases, these are people who never flooded.

We have got a levee district that we went and brought some of the FEMA officials out to just a few months ago, the Larose to Golden Meadow Hurricane Protection System in Lafourche Parish. We went out there. This is a levee protection system that was built by local people with local money, not Federal money. This wasn't a levee protection system that was built by the Corps of Engineers which, by the way, the Corps' levees failed during Katrina. These folks down in Lafourche Parish, they built their own levees, and they never flooded in Hurricane Katrina. They never flooded in Hurricanes Rita or Isaac. In fact, this levee protection system that was so successful that many of these people never even filed a flood insurance claim. And yet FEMA completely ignores that that levee protection system exists. And some of these people are going to be faced with \$25,000-a-year flood insurance premiums.

Now, some people might say that is an actuarially sound rate, but that is going to be a death sentence to those families. Everybody recognizes if you own a \$200,000 house and then FEMA comes and says, Okay, your annual premium for flood insurance is going to be \$25,000 a year, you are literally forcing that person to walk away from their home. So you are going to lose the money they are already paying into the system; and, again, in many cases, we are talking about people who never even flooded, people who paid their own tax dollars—not Federal money but local money to build a flood protection system that works.

It has worked for all of these storms, and yet FEMA is ignoring the fact that that flood protection system even exists. And ironically, FEMA certified the Corps flood protection systems that failed.

So these are the things that we are trying to address and fix, again, working in a bipartisan way because ultimately we want to see a competitive system. We want to see a system that is actuarially sound. But anybody who thinks that these massive rate increases you would be sending to people who played by the rules and never filed a claim in many cases can pay a \$15,000, \$20,000 a year premium just for flood insurance when it is much more than they are even paying for their own home note, it is just fantasy. So we are going to continue working to get this fixed, to put in place a system that is actuarially sound in a way where people can continue to play by the rules and continue to keep their homes and continue to be good, productive taxpayers and contribute to our society like they are today. So that is what we are going to continue working on.

Again, I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania for his leadership.

Mr. MARINO. Thank you, Congressman SCALISE.

Mr. Speaker, you heard the devastating stories tonight about what the American people are faced with. I have had over the past several weeks numerous conversations with people involved in this legislation, people involved in the agencies, people involved in committees. And to put it quite bluntly, FEMA's methodology is extremely, extremely flawed.

And I asked—I knew the answer to this, but I wanted to hear it from people with whom I spoke—So how many people is this affecting? Well, it is only affecting not quite 3 million people in the United States.

□ 1815

And I said, What do you mean, “only?” Well, we have indications that FEMA knew that there would be a small percentage, a small number of people who would get hit with extremely large bills. And I asked on the telephone when I was talking to several of these people, Are you one of the less than 3 million people? And there was dead silence. I said, Well, you have answered the question. You are not. So obviously this is just being taken for granted.

We have two places to go here. Do we want to create a myriad of ghost towns across this country or do we want to continue to improve cities and towns? I think the latter. I think we need to improve the quality of life for American people. We work, Congress works for the American people. I work for the people of the 10th Congressional District, and we have a responsibility here. We bail out the banks and we bail out the auto industry. And do you know something? My people in the 10th Congressional District—and I'm sure across this country—they do not want to be bailed out. They just want a level playing field.

So, in conclusion, I believe that we need to bring all the available options to the table for a bipartisan solution to the flood insurance rate increase. The colleagues that joined me this evening show how important it is to a wide range of districts throughout the country. We have to continue to be diligent in our work to assist these constituents, and I look forward to participating, along with my colleagues on the Committee on Financial Services, on crafting a solution.

Remember, Mr. Speaker, this is a nationwide problem. And I keep reiterating that many of the people in my district have a combined income of \$40,000 a year before taxes. They simply cannot afford \$10,000 and \$15,000 bills of which they had no anticipation it was coming.

I promise, and as my colleagues, I'm speaking for them, we will do everything in our power to make this right and to make this fair and to put our constituents on a level playing field.

THE CLASS OF 2006 FONDLY PAYS TRIBUTE TO GABBY GIFFORDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of Jan-

uary 3, 2013, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COHEN) for 30 minutes.

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the colleagues that have joined me today for our 30-minute Special Order, and this is a special Special Order.

This Special Order is particularly relevant because this is the third anniversary of the shooting in Tucson that took six lives and injured 13 people, including our colleague, Gabby Giffords. And when I say “our colleague,” it is our colleague of all of us here in the House of Representatives, but as a member of the class of '06 of which Representative Giffords is, we take special significance in this day because she was one of our prized Members. We all loved her, and we all miss her.

The class of '06 is a close class, and we are joined here by one of the presidents of the class of '06, Mr. YARMUTH, and Mr. PERLMUTTER, an active member of the class of '06, and there will be other members here, as well.

We want to express our remembrances of Gabby, and particularly the article that she wrote that is in today's New York Times, an op-ed called “The Lessons of Physical Therapy.” It is a very touching article that talks about her recovery and her indomitable spirit where she tells about her exercises every day to get back her strength and to be able to recover speech and physical mobility. Today, in fact, she skydived.

She is a great spirit who has not let the problems that she has experienced limit her in any ways more than they have, and she is trying to overcome these obstacles and teach people that they can overcome obstacles. She left the House after serving 5 years as a great colleague and coming back here on August the 1 of 2011 in what was a very memorable moment on this floor to vote on the debt ceiling, which was a close vote, and came back in case her vote was needed. And on that day, I was out at the airport greeting a very close person in my life and coincidentally was there when she came off the airplane. I saw Gabby and was able to see her for the first time since the January 8 incident.

Then she was on the floor and of course we all got to see her. But she came back and made that effort, and she thought about how can she contribute more. And after Newtown, she knew that she could contribute more by starting an organization with her great husband, Captain Mark Kelly, Responsible Solutions, on firearms and gun laws. She tried to really lead the effort and to make America's laws more sensible, to save other people from the tragedy that she experienced as did the six victims that day that died and the others that were injured, including Congressman BARBER, who led us in a moment of silence earlier today on the floor with the members of the Arizona delegation.

So we wanted to remember that day which is significant. It is a significant

day in congressional history and American history because that was an assault on Congresspeople meeting with their constituents, open government, democratic form of government and meeting and listening. Gabby was engaging in a Congress neighborhood meeting at the grocery there, which our ED PERLMUTTER did a lot of those. I remember him talking about them in the Caucus.

I first would like to yield at this moment to the president of our class. Mr. Hodes isn't with us, but the others, the surviving member of our class, Mr. YARMUTH, from Louisville, Kentucky.

Mr. YARMUTH. I thank the gentleman from Tennessee.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very meaningful day. Like so many other things in our lives, there are certain times, certain events that you always recall where you were when they occurred. And I remember very well that Saturday when I was at lunch with a group of friends and received word that Gabby had been shot. I remember later in the day not too long after that when the reports were actually that she had passed away. I remember the feelings I had then.

Fortunately, she did survive, but the emotions of that day live with me, and, unfortunately, they are reinforced too many times. They have been reinforced at Newtown and in Aurora. And even before the Gabby Giffords shooting in Tucson, they were reinforced in my community of Louisville, Kentucky, where a disgruntled employee shot, with an assault weapon, a number of coworkers in the Standard Gravure printing plant that prints the Courier-Journal. I remember also a mass shooting at Heath High School in Paducah, Kentucky, one of the first school shootings.

Unfortunately, the list continues to grow. Many of these inexplicable shootings are committed with weapons that are designed only to inflict massive casualties. And after Newtown, I spoke out the next day in saying actually that I was sorry that I had not spoken out on a regular basis, that I vowed at that point, as Gabby has vowed every day of her life over the last 3 years, to make it a mission to try and create saner gun laws in this country. Even in my State of Kentucky, with a very, very long and significant gun culture, vast majorities of our citizens believe that we ought to have universal background checks, and yet we have not been able to make any ground in that effort.

I think most people realize that in that Gabrielle Giffords shooting that Jared Loughner, the perpetrator, was actually wrestled to the ground when he had stopped to reload because he did not have a 30-capacity magazine. He had a lesser capacity magazine. And yet we can't deal with, again, these weapons and magazines made to inflict damage on many, many people.

I can't help but think that a lot of the frustration with Congress, with